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SIPDIS
TELEGRAM

November 19, 2003

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 5031 - ROUTINE)
TAGS: CVIS, CMGT, ECON, EPET, BEXP, KPAO
Captions: None
Subject: ADNOC EXECUTIVES AND STUDENTS ALLEGED MISTREATMENT OF VISITORS AT US PORTS OF ENTRY
Ref: None

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 05031

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ACTION: AMB
INFO: ECON PAO CONS DCM

DISSEMINATION: AMB
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: DCM:RALBRIGHT
DRAFTED: CON:TPONCE
CLEARED: PAO:HOLSIN-WINDECKER; CON:MMARRANO; ECON:OJOHN

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DE RUEHAD #5031/01 3231421
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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHDI/AMCONSUL DUBAI 3534
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2448
INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
ALSAC/ALL SOUTH ASIA COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 005031

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/PPD; NEA/ARP; NEA/FO; ECA; IIP/G/NESA;
CA/EX; CA/FO; CA/VO; CA/P

REF: ABU DHABI 4315

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: KPAO CVIS CMGT ECON EPET BEXP TC
SUBJECT: ADNOC EXECUTIVES AND STUDENTS ALLEGED MISTREATMENT OF VISITORS AT US PORTS OF ENTRY

¶11. (U) SUMMARY: ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2003, ABU DHABI CONOFF AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS ASSISTANT VISITED THE ABU DHABI NATIONAL OIL COMPANY (ADNOC) SCHOLARSHIP OFFICE. DURING THIS MEETING, CONOFF DISCUSSED VISA PROCESSING DELAYS, DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS) PROCEDURES AT US PORTS OF ENTRY (US POES), IMPROVEMENTS TO BOTH PROCESSES, AND NOTIFIED ADNOC

EXECUTIVES OF THE NEW FINGERPRINTING PROCEDURES. ALTHOUGH UNCONCERNED ABOUT THE NEW FINGERPRINTING PROCEDURES, THE ADNOC EXECUTIVES VOICED THEIR DISPLEASURE AT ALLEGED MISTREATMENT OF UAE STUDENTS BY DHS OFFICERS. THEY NOTED THAT SUCH BEHAVIOR IS A PRIMARY REASON THEY RECOMMEND THEIR STUDENTS CHOOSE AUSTRALIA AND THE UK OVER THE US. ADNOC SENT ONLY 4 NEW STUDENTS TO THE U.S. IN 2002 AND IS ONLY SENDING 2 NEW STUDENTS FOR 2003, DOWN FROM AN AVERAGE OF 100 TO 150 EACH YEAR. SIMILAR VIEWS WERE EXPRESSED IN A VIDEOCONFERENCE ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 10, WHERE UAE STUDENTS AND SCHOLARSHIP OFFICIALS URGED DHS AND STATE TO REVIEW USG ACTIONS AT ITS BORDERS. END SUMMARY.

NEW AND IMPROVED: FINGERPRINTS AND FASTER VISA PROCESSING

¶12. (U) AS PART AN ONGOING OUTREACH PROGRAM TO STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND UAE SCHOLARSHIP OFFICIALS, CONOFF AND FSN CULTURAL AFFAIRS ASSISTANT MET WITH ADNOC SCHOLARSHIP OFFICE HEAD AHMED OBAID AL MANSOURI AND SENIOR SCHOLARSHIP OFFICER MOHAMMED NAWAR AL ABID. CONOFF BEGAN BY EXPLAINING THE NEW FINGERPRINTING REQUIREMENTS FOR NIV APPLICANTS. THE DEMONSTRATION INCLUDED PICTURES OF THE FINGERPRINTING DEVICE, COPIES OF ARTICLES ON THE PROCEDURES, AN EXPLANATION OF USE OF THE DEVICE, AND DREW UPON CA PRESS GUIDANCE TO ANSWER BASIC QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROCEDURES. CONOFF NOTED THAT THE FINGERPRINTING PROCEDURES AND RECENT CHANGES TO THE VISA PROCESS ARE PART OF THE USG EFFORT TO INCREASE US SECURITY WHILE FACILITATING THE TRAVEL OF LEGITIMATE VISITORS.

FINGERS, SHMINGERS - TREATMENT AT BORDER IS THE CONCERN

¶13. (SBU) MR. AL MANSOURI RAISED THE ISSUE OF STUDENT TURNAROUNDS AT US POES DUE TO NATIONAL SECURITY ENTRY/EXIT REGISTRATIONS SYSTEM (NSEERS) NON-COMPLIANCE. MR. AL ABID ADDED THAT THE IMPROVEMENTS IN THE VISA PROCESS WERE MUCH APPRECIATED AND THAT THE FINGERPRINTING PROCEDURES ARE NOT A CONCERN. THEIR PRIMARY CONCERN, HOWEVER, IS THE ALLEGED MISTREATMENT OF STUDENTS AND OTHER UAE CITIZENS AT US POES. MR. AL ABID STATED THAT 10 ADNOC SCHOLARSHIP STUDENTS HAD FAILED TO COMPLY WITH NSEERS EXIT REQUIREMENTS FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS INCLUDING LACK OF SIGNAGE AT AIRPORTS AND CONFUSING INFORMATION (SEE REFTEL) AND HAVE BEEN TURNED AROUND. THESE NSEERS VIOLATORS HAVE ACKNOWLEDGED THEIR FAILURE TO COMPLY BUT HAVE ALSO ALLEGED THAT THEY HAVE BEEN MISTREATED BY DHS OFFICERS AT US POES.

¶14. (SBU) MR. AL ABID EMPHASIZED THAT THE PROBLEM IS NOT THAT STUDENTS AND VISITORS MUST BE FINGERPRINTED. THE PROBLEM IS HOW RUDELY PEOPLE ARE BEING TREATED AT US POES. THESE ACTIONS GIVE LEGITIMACY TO NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES ABOUT THE US. ADNOC, WHICH USUALLY SENDS 100 TO 150 STUDENTS EACH YEAR TO THE US, SENT 4 NEW STUDENTS IN 2002 AND WILL ONLY SEND 2 NEW STUDENTS FOR 2003. BEFORE SEPTEMBER 11TH, ADNOC HAD APPROXIMATELY 450 STUDENTS IN THE US. NOW, THE NUMBER HAS DIPPED TO 197, AND THIS TREND WILL LIKELY CONTINUE AS STUDENTS GRADUATE AND ADNOC DIRECTS NEW AND CURRENT STUDENTS TO STUDY IN AUSTRALIA AND THE UK. "STUDENTS WANT TO GO TO THE US. BUT THEY ARE TIRED OF BEING MISTREATED," HE NOTED.

¶15. (U) MR. AL ABID RECOMMENDED THAT STUDENTS ALREADY IN THE US BE ALLOWED TO GO TO DHS OFFICES FOR FINGERPRINTING AND EXACT INSTRUCTIONS ON DEPARTING AND ENTERING THE US TO ENSURE THAT THEY ARE NOT HARASSED AT US POES. IN ADDITION, HE SUGGESTED THAT A US IDENTIFICATION CARD BE ISSUED TO ALL STUDENT VISITORS TO ENSURE THEIR LEGITIMATE STATUS IN THE US IS RECOGNIZED. "MAYBE THIS WILL REDUCE THE HARASSMENT THEY RECEIVE AT US POES," HE ADDED.

THINGS ARE IMPROVING - JUST WAIT AND SEE

¶16. (U) CONOFF REPLIED THAT IMPROVEMENTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO VISA PROCESSING, AND VISITORS ARE BEING TREATED BETTER AT ALL

US POES. HE ADDED THAT ANOTHER SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT WOULD BE THE INSTALLATION OF EXIT CONTROLS AT ALL US POES. THIS NEW EXIT SYSTEM WILL INCLUDE SELF-SERVICE KIOSKS THAT PROVIDE VISITORS INFORMATION ON PROPERLY EXITING THE US. FINALLY, CONOFF NOTED THAT NSEERS VIOLATORS MAY APPLY FOR A NEW VISA AND EXPLAIN TO A CONOFF THEIR REASONS FOR NON-COMPLIANCE. MANY UAE STUDENTS HAVE SUBSEQUENTLY RECEIVED A NEW VISA AND RETURNED TO STUDIES IN THE US.

DRIVEN HOME AGAIN - LIVE VIA SATELLITE

¶7. (U) ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2003, THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE FACILITATED A DIGITAL VIDEOCONFERENCE (DVC) FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND ADMINISTRATORS FROM THE HIGHER COLLEGES OF TECHNOLOGY AND THE ALL-WOMEN ZAYED UNIVERSITY AND OFFICIALS FROM MAJOR UAE SCHOLARSHIP OFFICES. IN WASHINGTON, PARTICIPANTS INCLUDED CA AND PD OFFICIALS, A DHS BUREAU OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE STUDENT AND EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM (SEVP) OFFICE, AND OFFICIALS AND UAE STUDENTS FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY (GW).

¶8. (U) DURING THE DVC, EACH WASHINGTON PARTICIPANT GAVE AN IMPRESSION OF VISA PROCESSING AND REGULATIONS AND LIVING, WORKING, AND/OR STUDYING IN THE US POST-SEPTEMBER 11TH. GW OFFICIALS AND STUDENTS RECALTED FEW PROBLEMS WITH VISA PROCESSING AND ENTRY AND EXIT FROM US POES AND EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF EACH UNIVERSITY'S INTERNATIONAL STUDENT OFFICE AS THE POINT OF CONTACT FOR ANY PROBLEMS NEW STUDENTS MAY ENCOUNTER. THE UAE STUDENTS FROM GW NOTED THAT THEY HAD EXPERIENCED NO HARASSMENT OR PROBLEMS SINCE SEPTEMBER 11TH, ALTHOUGH ONE RECOMMENDED THAT STUDENTS "STAY AWAY FROM THE MIDWEST AND MORE CONSERVATIVE AREAS OF THE COUNTRY." THE CA AND DHS OFFICIALS FOCUSED ON IMPROVING STUDENT UNDERSTANDING OF VISA PROCESSING AT AN EMBASSY OR CONSULATE, HOW THE STUDENT AND EXCHANGE VISITOR INFORMATION SYSTEM (SEVIS) REGISTRATION AND FORM I-20 ARE GENERATED, HOW THESE AND OTHER DOCUMENTS ARE NECESSARY AT ENTRY AND EXIT, AND WHAT STUDENTS SUBJECT TO NSEERS REQUIREMENTS MUST DO AT POES AND AFTER THEY ARRIVE.

¶9. (U) AT THE BEGINNING OF THE QUESTION-AND-ANSWER PERIOD, QUESTIONS FROM THE UAE PARTICIPANTS FOCUSED ON DHS TREATMENT OF STUDENTS AND VISITORS AT US POES. ONE UAE STUDENT NOTED THAT HE WAS TURNED AROUND SIMPLY BECAUSE HE COULD NOT FIND THE APPROPRIATE OFFICE. LIKEWISE, SCHOLARSHIP OFFICIALS FROM ADNOC AND ABU DHABI INVESTMENT AUTHORITY, WHICH ALONE FUNDED THE STUDY OF APPROXIMATELY 1,500 UAE STUDENTS IN THE US PRIOR TO SEPTEMBER 11TH, ASSERTED THAT DHS OFFICERS' TREATMENT OF STUDENTS AND VISITORS AT US POES WAS THE PRIMARY REASON STUDENTS WERE CHOOSING OTHER COUNTRIES. BOTH OFFICIALS URGED DHS TO REVIEW DHS OFFICERS' TREATMENT OF STUDENTS AND VISITORS AT POES AND TAKE ACTION.

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT: WHILE CONTENTIOUS, THE DVC ACHIEVED TWO IMPORTANT AND POSITIVE RESULTS. FIRST, THE DVC PROVIDED AN OUTLET FOR STUDENTS AND SCHOLARSHIP OFFICIALS TO VENT THEIR FRUSTRATIONS WITH WASHINGTON-BASED USG OFFICIALS AT THE STRICTURES OF NEW VISA AND POE PROCEDURES. SECOND, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE STUDENTS AND ADMINISTRATORS IN ATTENDANCE SAW FIRST HAND THAT THE PROCEDURES ARE NOT AS DIFFICULT AS THE UAE'S CONSPIRACY THEORISTS MAKE THEM OUT TO BE AND, FROM CREDIBLE EMIRATI SOURCES, THAT THE US IS STILL THE BEST PLACE TO TRAVEL AND STUDY. WE WILL NEED TO CONTINUE THIS OUTREACH EFFORT TO DEAL WITH BOTH THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT THE U.S. VISA/DHS PROCESS AND WITH THE AGGRESSIVE EFFORTS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES TO CAPITALIZE ON THIS MISUNDERSTANDING TO PROMOTE THEIR EDUCATION AND TRAINING ALTERNATIVES.

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: ADNOC'S DECISION TO DIRECT ITS STUDENTS ELSEWHERE HAS TROUBLING LONG TERM REPERCUSSIONS FOR U.S. ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL INTERESTS, ESPECIALLY TO THE EXTENT IT REFLECTS A LARGER TREND. FOR EXAMPLE, WE HAVE HEARD FROM CONTACTS AT OCCIDENTAL PETROLEUM THAT ITS UAE PARTNERS IN THE MULTI-BILLION DOLLAR DOLPHIN PROJECT (TO BRING NATURAL GAS FROM QATAR TO THE UAE) HAVE DECIDED TO SEND STUDENTS TO FRANCE FOR TRAINING, BECAUSE OF VISA PROBLEMS. AS ADNOC AND ADIA

PERSONNEL ARE INCREASINGLY TRAINED OUTSIDE THE U.S., THE U.S. NOT ONLY LOSES THE OPPORTUNITY TO TRAIN UAE OFFICIALS, BUT ALSO RISKS LOSING CONTRACTS AND EXPORT OPPORTUNITIES AS THESE OFFICIALS NO LONGER HAVE THE TIES TO THE U.S. THAT THEY ONCE DID. END COMMENT.

WAHBA